

CHRIST REMEMBERED, SIN FORGOTTEN

Ben Janssen | **Hebrews 10:1-18** | June 23, 2019

⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” ⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

“Let’s make a memory.” Life, after all, is enriched and even empowered by the memories we make.

So last night, when my daughter asked me if, after dinner, we could have a water war, I said, “yes.” I didn’t know exactly what a water war was, although it was pretty clear it involved water used as a weapon.

We sat down at a table outside, five cups of water for each person. By luck of the draw, you would win the privilege of throwing a cup into the face of your opponent. Win five of these privileges before your opponent, and you won the match, and the privilege of dumping a gallon of ice water over their head.

After about 6 of these matches, Quentin was declared the winner. But of course, everyone ended up soaked and cold. when an unregulated war with water hoses broke out. But I was the undisputed winner of that war.

At any rate. We made a memory.

As we come to chapter ten in the sermon called *Hebrews*, we find the Preacher wrapping up his exposition on the theology of Christ as a great high priest. He’ll begin to make more explicit the application of this theology to our lives as Christians. One way we might summarize the Christian life is by saying it is to be a life of remembering. When we live as participants of the new covenant, we live with a reminder of sin, a reminder of Christ, and a reminder of grace.

A REMINDER OF SIN

First, if we are going to live under the new covenant, then we cannot live without a reminder of sin. In verses 1-4, the Preacher says this is exactly what the animal sacrifices in the old covenant were designed to do, and the remembrance of sin is an important aspect of the new covenant as well.

Living in the Shadow

Verse 1 says that the law possessed only a “shadow of the good things to come” and not “the true form of these realities.” What is a shadow? It is a “representation of something real.”¹ Let’s say you’re looking this way on a bright summer day, and all of a sudden an overwhelming darkness comes over you. What will you do? You’ll turn around and see what large thing looms nearby. The shadow has an effect on you, but it’s not the shadow that is your concern. It’s what the shadow signifies. It’s what the shadow represents.

Now our verse says here that the law possessed only a “shadow of the good things to come.” Contained within the law of Moses and the old covenant in general was only a hint of the goodness that was coming. These “good things to come” have already been defined in the previous chapter. “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,” we were told in Hebrews 9:11. And the reference there was to the perfecting of the conscience of the worshiper and free access therefore into the presence of God. The law hinted at this. It suggested that this privilege would become a reality. But the law itself did not possess “the true form of these realities.” It could not bring these good things to pass. If we rely on our obedience to the law to do this, we become legalists, trying to earn our way into the presence of God.

But this is to mistake the shadow for the real thing.

The Purpose of the Shadow

Others are more inclined to get out from under the shadow. To refuse to live by any law. But the problem here is that the shadow of the law is not a bad thing. It is a shadow of *good things to come*.

The law only becomes a problem when we separate it from the gracious character of God.² You can do this by rebelling against it, like the Prodigal Son, or you can do it by obeying it, like his older brother. The purpose of the shadow is not to incite rebellion against God; it is a shadow of good things to come. But neither is its purpose to tell us how we can earn our way into God’s favor. Verse one makes it plain: the law and its sacrifices could “never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.” What is meant by “perfection” is made clear in verse two. It involves a cleansing so thorough that a person no longer has any consciousness of sins. No amount of obedience on our part, no number of sacrifices, can ever free one from a sense of sin and transgression in the presence of a holy and awesome God.³

So what the law did, according to verse three, is remind the people of their sins. It was a constant reminder of their guilt before a holy and awesome God. But this is actually the positive aspect of the law, for in this constant reminder of sin, it diagnoses our real problem. We are messed up. I mean we are *really* messed up. And we cannot save ourselves. “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (v. 4). This constant reminder of sins is meant to bring us a sense of sin so that we come to the end of ourselves and go looking for rescue someplace else.

Looking Ahead

So we don't do away with the law. We need this reminder of sins. This is one reason why, in our worship together, we have a public confession of sin that we recite together. It is good for us to know that we are sinners. The law of God leads us to recognize our sins and to confess them, to give up on our own pursuit of the good life.

The law cannot save us. But it does direct us. It directs us to recognize the helpless state we find ourselves in and to go looking for help. Not in some other law, not in some new technique for us to try.

If you feel weary of sin and out of options then the law has done its job. And that's a good thing.

A REMINDER OF CHRIST

Because now that we are reminded, painfully so, of our sins, we are able to see why we need a priest. We need a great priest. And we have just the one we need in Jesus. And we need to remember this. We must not live only with a reminder of sin that comes from the law, but we must live with a reminder of Christ, the only one who can solve our problem.

Psalm 40 Fulfilled in Christ

The word *consequently* in verse 5 stakes out a transition from law (which reminds us of sin) to gospel (which removes our sin). If verses 1-4 present us with a problem, namely that the law and its animal sacrifices could not take away sins, then verses 5-10 present us with the solution, namely that the good news is that provision has been made for sins to be removed.

That provision is Jesus. Jesus *himself*. It is not what was done by Jesus, as if it could have been done by anybody. This is a common, even if subtle, mistake. It is Christ we need to remember. Only then will his achievement for us matter.

The Preacher puts on Jesus's lips the words of Psalm 40:6-8, telling us that he sees Jesus's incarnation as a fulfillment of the psalm.⁴ The verses of this psalm tell us the central purpose for the incarnation, the ultimate reason why Jesus took on human flesh, why the Son of God was born. He was born so that he could have a body.⁵ He was born so he could be like us. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood," Hebrews 2:14 says, "he himself likewise partook of the same things."

What God Wills

Now notice how the Preacher interprets the passage in verses 8-10. He wants us to see the distinction between the sacrifices of animals and the incarnation of Christ. Both have bodies. But the distinction is found in the *desire* or *will* of God. The distinction is found in what God wants.

We are told first what he does *not* want. "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings." Now the Preacher reminds us that these things

were “offered according to the law,” so in one sense God did desire them. That is to say, God commanded these animal sacrifices and expected them to be offered according to his direction, but the whole system of animal sacrifice was provisional and temporary. They were not what God really wanted.

What is it that God really wanted? It would be tempting to answer, “He wanted the perfect sacrifice of his own Son.” Indeed, the entire previous chapter demonstrated the superior sacrifice of Christ on the cross that has decisively purged sin (Heb 9:14, 26). But this is not the end. It is a means to an end, the end that God is after.

What is it that God really wanted? The answer given to us here is that what God wanted all along is not sacrifices for sin at all but rather heart obedience. One commentator observes, “The practice of cultic rituals, apart from heart obedience, misses God’s intention for the sacrificial system.”⁶ The sacrificial system was necessary precisely because what God wanted from his people was not done. It’s not simply *avoiding* sin but the *doing* of righteousness that God wanted. “What does the Lord require?” asks the prophet Micah. “To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). This, of course, we have failed to do.

Sanctified by the Will of God

But this is precisely what Jesus did. He says in verse 9, Behold, I have come to do your will.” And he succeeded in this mission, perfectly obeying the Father, all the way to his death on the cross (Jn 14:31; Phil 2:8).

In so doing, the Preacher says that Jesus “does away with the first in order to establish the second.” That is, Jesus has removed the system of sacrifice under the terms of the old covenant in order that he might establish a system of obedience under the terms of the new. Jesus not only took away our sin by his substitutionary death; equally important is that he fulfilled the obligations of the law in our place as well. Jesus died the death we deserved to die. But Jesus also lived the life we were required to live. He did both on our behalf.

And this means that “a radically new situation for the community of God’s people” has arrived in Jesus.⁷ Because of Jesus’s life and his death, a new covenant with God has been enacted replacing the old covenant. The first one has been done away with in order for the new one to be established.

And verse 10 puts it most succinctly. “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” *Sanctified* means to be holy, to be dedicated and consecrated to God. This is what God wanted. He wanted a people for his own possession, completely consecrated to himself. Fully dedicated to him and his purposes. To be sanctified, to be holy, is to be obedient to God. And Christian, this is who you are. You are sanctified, you are holy, you are fully obedient to God—notice how verse 10 says it—“by that will.” That is, “by the will of God fulfilled by Christ.”⁸ It’s what Paul says in Romans 5:19, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Some of you have never understood this before. You know that Jesus's death paid the penalty for your disobedience, both the disobedience of original sin since you were born "in Adam," as well as the specific acts of disobedience that come from original sin. But don't you see that Jesus's life fulfilled the requirement of your total consecration to God? If you are "in Christ," then his righteous life counts as yours as well. This is what theologians call the "active" and "passive" obedience of Christ, by which we are saved. Jerry Bridges explains:

Active obedience means Christ's sinless life here on earth, His perfect obedience and absolute holiness. This perfect life is credited to those who trust in Him for their salvation. His passive obedience refers to His death on the cross through which He fully paid the penalty for our sins and placated the wrath of God toward us.⁹

In Remembrance of Me

Ok, so maybe you have heard this before. But this is such massive news that we need to hear it over and over again. We need it to sink in, deep within. This is what we mean when we say we need to remember Christ. It's not that we are in danger of forgetting who he is, or losing the ability to articulate what he has done. We're talking about the need to remember as a way of life. It's like how I need to remember to live by my priorities every day, not just know what those priorities are (I can articulate them to you, no problem), but to actually put those priorities into practice. I can say, "God is my highest priority," but I need disciplines to help me remember that this is true.

So we need help remembering that we are saved, that we are justified, and that we are sanctified "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Nothing could be more important than this. We need to live by it.

Is this not at least a significant reason why our Lord instituted the sacrament of communion? Isn't this what he must mean when he tells us to take the bread and the cup, identified as his body and the new covenant in his blood, and to partake of them together "in remembrance" of him? In the same way that the repeated animal sacrifices reminded old covenant believers of the pollution of sin, so the repeated participation of the Lord's Supper serves to remind us of all the benefits that come to us in the once for all offering of the body of Christ.

A REMINDER OF GRACE

This sermon could end here, except that our text does not. The Preacher has one more thing to say to us as he brings to a close his exposition on this central theological truth of the priesthood of Christ. In verses 11-18 we find that with Christ as our high priest, we live with a constant reminder of grace.

Sitting and Waiting

There isn't any new information introduced in these verses. But there is a powerful application of what has been said. First, the Preacher shows the distinction between the sacrifices of the old covenant and the single sacrifice that established the new. In the old covenant, the priests had to

stand in the presence of God, offer the same sacrifices over and over and over again, without any hope that their sacrifices could bring a permanent solution to the problem of sin.

But in the new covenant, we see Christ, our High Priest, sitting in the presence of God, and this distinction in posture is significant. It means he is done, but not yet done. It means that “the sacrificial phase of his priestly ministry is completed.”¹⁰ But, he has not yet appeared a second time (Heb 9:28); he is still in the presence of God, sitting. He is “waiting,” we are told in verse 13, “until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.” This is the fourth time the Preacher has referred to the wording of Psalm 110:1, and the emphasis this time is on the waiting. His decisive sacrifice is complete, but, William Lane says, he is waiting “for the complete subjugation of every power that resists the gracious redemptive purposes of God.”¹¹

Let there be no confusion about this time in which we now live, between the first and second advent of Christ. We do not wait with anxiety about the future; the future is secure and finally determined by the decisive achievement of Christ’s sacrifice. We’re always tempted to get nervous and try to “fix” everything by our own efforts. But God’s grace is a prevailing grace, and nothing is going to prevent his grace from achieving all that God has purposed to do. The work has been done.

Waiting in Confidence

But what are we supposed to do in the meantime, as we are here waiting with Christ? All his enemies have not yet been put under his feet, so neither have ours. And that includes our own sin which troubles us and tempts us, discourages us and destroys us.

What about this indwelling sin that remains within us and in our world? If “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,” why do we still sin?

Verse 14 seems to say something different. “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” Those who *are being sanctified*? Is this meant to correct verse 10, to be sure we know that sanctification is not complete, that we are not really sanctified so long as sin remains?

No, not at all. Notice what the Preacher says in the very same verse. He says, that Christ, by a single offering, *has perfected for all time*. The achievement of Christ, along with the phrase “for all time,” indicates the permanency of what has been done. “In a word,” wrote John Murray, “Jesus met all the [needs] arising from our sin and he *procured* all the benefits that lead to, and are consummated in, the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”¹²

So while sin remains as an enemy to be subdued, this verse assures us that for those for whom Christ died, the subjugation is certain. Our sanctification, our holiness, is not in question. Because it all comes from Christ’s sacrifice, it is done, and our holiness is assured.

The Assurance of the Holy Spirit

But don't take my word for it. The Preacher reminds us in verse 15 that it is the Holy Spirit who bears witness to us, again from the words of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31. God's promise to us with whom he has made a new covenant is that he will put his laws on our hearts and minds, he will in fact ensure our obedience (v. 16). Obedience still matters, even under the new covenant. It's still what God wants.

But what makes all the difference is what the Preacher highlights in verse 17. This law written on our hearts can only play out within a context of forgiveness. Radical forgiveness. Powerful grace. "Our relationship to the law is not a bare legal one, coldly impersonal," writes Sinclair Ferguson. Rather, "our conformity to it is the fruit of our marriage to our new husband Jesus Christ."¹³ Only when you know you are loved apart from your action and obedience. Only when you know your justification *and your sanctification* are granted in Christ. Only then do you have the power to live obediently in a way that pleases the Lord.

So just as there remains a reminder of sin, and just as we seek to be reminded of Christ, so also the Holy Spirit assures us of our pardon and stirs up our obedience by reminding us of grace.

Christ has made a memory for us. Let's live together in remembrance of him.

¹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), [929](#).

² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), [141](#).

³ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), [261](#).

⁴ The word for *world* here is different than the word used in Hebrews 1:6 where it refers to Christ's coming into the heavenly realm at the ascension.

⁵ The difference in the Greek translation of Psalm 40:6 reflected here in Hebrews is best explained as the LXX's interpretation of the Hebrew language. "Digging the ears" was understood to be a reference to "the total work of fashioning a human body" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990], [240](#).)

⁶ George Guthrie, "Hebrews," *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), [978](#).

⁷ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, [265](#).

⁸ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, [243 n. 49](#).

⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), [32–33](#).

¹⁰ Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, [267](#).

¹¹ [Ibid.](#)

¹² John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), [58](#). Emphasis original.

¹³ Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, [154](#).